

Legacy and lessons from SWIOFP – 2 years on

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The South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Project (SWIOFP) formed part of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Large Marine Ecosystems Programme in the Western Indian Ocean between 2008 and 2013. The project area comprised the Exclusive Economic Zones of 8 countries (Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania) and French islands of Reunion and Mayotte. SWIOFP aimed to: assess existing and potential offshore fisheries; provide scientific information for developing fisheries management plans; strengthen institutional capacity; and foster collaborative networks across the region. To achieve these objectives, SWIOFP was structured into 6 components: data and information management; crustacean, demersal and pelagic fish resources; biodiversity impacts of fisheries; and strengthening of regional fisheries management structures. Kenya hosted the SWIOFP regional management unit and secretariat at KMFRI, and also led the data component. The Implementation Completion Report, prepared by all participant countries in 2012/13, rated the performance of SWIOFP as 'satisfactory' for implementation, and 'moderately satisfactory' for outcomes. Many important lessons were learnt. On the up side was the truly participatory process in project design and implementation, which ensured stakeholder buy-in and relevance of project objectives. Hence, a strong regional collaborative network developed, and challenges could be addressed by pooling of scarce resources. An extensive Master's degree programme proved efficient in achieving 2 objectives simultaneously, at relatively low cost: contributing to SWIOFP scientific outputs through analysis of survey data; and capacity development to an MSc level. Linking fisheries research projects with RFMO's (such as the SWIO Fisheries Commission) provided significant benefits, and enhanced post-SWIOFP continuity. On the down side, project design was over-optimistic, given existing infrastructure limitations. Parts of SWIOFP (i.e. integrated region-wide fisheries observer programme; 40 surveys at sea using research and fishing vessels) could therefore not be implemented satisfactorily, and placed a heavy burden on project resources. SWIOFP relied on existing government employees and structures for its implementation, thus increasing their workload, but without financial incentives. Project implementation was therefore slower, compared to simply employing consultants, but it enhanced skills and networking within government agencies. The complexity of SWIOFP (multiple countries, languages, needs) required a long run-up time to render project management structures efficient, and real momentum was only achieved in the last 2 years, when project implementation was rated 'highly satisfactory'. Therefore SWIOFP would have benefitted from more time. Science (conceptualization, data collection, analysis, reporting, write-up) is a multi-year process, so that many SWIOFP outputs have only been achieved after project conclusion. This legacy needs to be incorporated into regional management strategies, with assistance of the SWIO Fisheries Commission.